DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 256 421 JC 850 197

AUTHOR Morris, Cathy
TITLE Retention Rate Related to Choice of First Term Coursework. Research Report No. 82-39.
INSTITUTION Miami-Dade Community Coll., Fla. Office of Institutional Research.
PUB DATE Dec 82
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Persistence; Community Colleges; *Courses; *Enrollment Influences; Full Time Students; Part Time Students; Remedial Instruction; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Miami-Dade Community College to determine whether a student's choice of first-term courses related to subsequent retention. The database used for the study was the Basic Skills Validity Studies file, which contains records on all first-time-in-college students tested during the fall 1980-81 term, including information on the developmental and core courses taken by the students and the total credits carried during the term. Study findings indicated that taking extra coursework beyond developmental and core courses during the first term improved student retention. For students with low basic skills levels, optimal retention occurred when a mix of core, developmental, and extra coursework was taken. Students who chose to take only developmental courses had quite low retention rates, as did students who chose to take only non-developmental/non-core courses. While the retention rate for part-time students was generally much lower than that for full-time students, in every case the selection of an extra course during the first term improved retention. (AYC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. H. McCabe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED256421

RETENTION RATE RELATED TO CHOICE OF FIRST TERM COURSEWORK

Research Report No. 82-39

December 1982

Cathy Morris

Associate Director

Miami-Dade Community College

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

John Losak, Dean

JC 830 197

Retention Rate Related to Choice of First Term Coursework

This study addresses the question of whether a student's choice of first term coursework relates to subsequent retention. This question has been asked by various college administrators including the South Campus Vice-President and the College President. The question was formally raised by the College-wide Placement and Follow-up Committee, and Institutional Research agreed to attempt to provide a tentative answer using existing data bases. All of the above individuals who expressed a concern had the sense that students were better retained if permitted to take some program coursework during their first term.

The data base used for the study provided only partial details of the first term coursework. The findings are so consistent, however, that implications will be drawn from these data. The data base used was the Basic Skills Validity Studies file. This file contains all first-time in college students tested during the Fall Term of 1980-81. The file also contains records of any Developmental work taken by each student, as well as a record of enrollment in the general education courses that have now been converted to the "Core". It was thus possible to determine how many Developmental and "Core" credits <u>each</u> student had registered for during the first term of enrollment. Additionally, the file contained data for total credits registered during the first term. The difference between these two numbers provided an indication as to whether the student had taken any extra coursework. The actual composition of this extra coursework is unknown. We can state with certainty that it was not Developmental

or "Core" coursework. Retention rate was examined separately for students at various basic skills levels. A separate analysis is also provided for part-time versus full-time students.

Table 1 presents data on the two-year retention rate of all tested first-time-in-college students. The left headings on the table indicate various combinations of Developmental and "Core" type courses. For each possible combination the number of students enrolled in 80-1, the number who returned in 81-2, and the percent return rate is given. The top headings on the table give both the basic skills levels of the students and whether they enrolled in extra coursework beyond Developmental and "Core". Students are grouped into those who were above the placement score on three tests, no tests, one test, or two tests. Under each of these headings data are further sub-divided by choice of extra coursework. Tables 2 and 3 follow the same format.

Beginning with the bottom set of figures in Table 1, note that there is a fairly even set of students at each of the Basic Skills levels. Of the 6,726 tested students, 2,321 (34.5%) were above the placement score on all three tests, 1,462 students (21.7%) were below the placement score on all three tests, 1,342 students (20.0%) were above the placement score on one test, and 1,601 students (23.8%) were above the placement score on two tests. Ignoring the factor of extra coursework taken, the return rate for these students respectively was 60%, 42%, 54%, and 54%. When the variable of extra coursework is added, notice that in every case return rate is higher for those students who took some extra coursework during their first term. For example, students above the placement score on all three tests who took extra coursework had a return rate of 61.4%, while students

who did not take extra coursework had a return rate of 45.7%. The details of the coursework taken can be seen from the data in the body of the table. The largest difference appearing on the table is for students above the placement score on all three tests who enrolled in "Core" type coursework. Those who also took extra coursework have a retention rate of 63.7%, while those who did not take extra coursework have a retention rate of 45.5%. This is slightly more than an 18 percentage point difference. The smallest difference on the table is for students above the placement score on two tests who took both Developmental and "Core" type courses their first term. Students who also took extra coursework show a retention rate that is only slightly over one percentage point different. In general, however, the percentage point difference for students who took extra coursework versus those who did not in all entries on the table is greater than 10.

An examination of the data in each column allows an analysis of students by separate basic skills levels. For students above the placement score on all three tests, the modal category for course choice was a "Core" type course plus extra coursework (1,729 students). This is consistent with the expected advisement policy for this group of students. Note however that some of the students at this skill level did take Developmental coursework. Looking down the column, notice the retention rate in general increases as we move from Developmental coursework only to both Developmental and "Core" courses. And, in each of these cases retention rate is highest if extra coursework is taken. Continuing down the column, the data show a considerable drop in retention rate for those students who took extra coursework only (48.0% retained). These data suggest that even for students who were above the placement score on all three tests,

enrolling in some "Core" type coursework plus extra coursework during the first term leads to the best retention.

The second column of Table 1 presents data for students below the placement score on all three tests. The modal category of coursework choice for these students is Developmental work plus extra courses (481 students). Note once again the higher retention rate for these students compared to students who took only Developmental coursework and no extra coursework. Continuing on down the column, retention rate improves and is the highest for students who took a combination of Developmental, "Core", and extra coursework. Notice once again that for students who took extra coursework only (173 students) the retention rate decreases considerably. Perhaps the most significant finding about this group of students who were below the placement score on all three tests is that the choice of coursework that seems to be the mode for this group is not the combination which produces the best retention rate.

The patterns for students above the placement score on one or two of the tests mirror those already discussed. Retention rate increases as we proceed down the columns, and in each case is higher if the student took extra coursework during the first term. Taking extra coursework alone, however, leads to a reduced retention rate.

In summary, these data indicate that taking extra coursework beyond developmental and "Core" type courses during the first term improves retention. Additionally, the best possible combination of coursework appears to be some Developmental, some "Core" and some extra coursework. Students who choose to take only Developmental coursework have quite low

retention rates. But surprisingly, students who choose to take only extra coursework (not Developmental or "Core") also have low retention rates. These data suggest that either extreme in course choice leads to reduced retention, and that a balanced choice of courses is perhaps the best guidance to offer first-time-in-college students.

Previous data have indicated that retention patterns are quite different for full-time versus part-time students. For the group of tested students just discussed, 4,785 (65%) were full-time during their first term and 2,341 (35%) were part-time during their first term. The proportion of full-time students is thus much higher among tested students as a whole than for College-wide data. Tables 2 and 3 present an analysis for full-time and for part-time students separately. Data in Table 2 indicate that retention rate differences due to choice of extra coursework during a student's first term are very slight for full-time students. Note at the bottom of the table that for students above the placement score on three, none, or one test, the improvement in retention rate is not more than 5 percentage points when extra coursework was chosen. For students above the placement score on two of the tests, retention rate is actually higher when no extra coursework was chosen. Examining data down the columns, note that for students above the placement score on all three tests the modal category of course choice was "Core" type courses plus extra coursework (1,377 students). Retention rates in this column are generally quite high except for the 35.7% rate for the small group of students who elected to take Developmental coursework even though they were above the placement score on all three tests. For students above the placement score on none of the tests, the modal category is once again a choice of developmental

coursework plus extra coursework. While this is the modal course choice, it is not the choice that leads to the highest retention rate. As was true for the group as a whole, full-time students who are below the placement score on all three tests show a much higher retention when developmental coursework is supplemented with some "Core" type course. This same improved retention with a combination of coursework is also evident for students above the placement score on one test.

Data for part-time students in Table 3 mirror almost exactly the findings from Table 1. While retention rate for part-time students is in general much lower than for full-timers, in every case the selection of an extra course during the first term improves retention. It should be noted that 89 percent of these part-time students were self-declared degree-seekers which implies that part-time students who undergo basic skills testing are predominantly here for degree work and not for other personal interest. Data in the table also indicate that retention rate improves considerably when a mixture of courses is taken during the first term. Perhaps one of the most significant findings from Table 3 is that part-time students who take only extra coursework (no Developmental and no "Core") have a very low retention rate. Thus a degree-seeking part-time student is better retained if first term coursework includes some "Core" and/or Developmental work as well as program courses.

In summary, the data in this report indicate that retention rates are optimized if tested students select a mixture of courses during their first term which include some courses other than "Core" type courses and/or Developmental courses. We were not able to identify the specific kind of extra coursework taken by these students, but the consistency of

the findings lends support to the notion that students who are allowed to choose a course of interest beyond the basic requirements show better retention. For students at low basic skills levels, optimal retention occurs when a mix of "Core", Developmental, and extra coursework is taken. Finally, simply allowing students to pursue extra coursework of their own choice with no Developmental or "Core" type courses does not appear to lead to an increased retention rate. For the group as a whole, and quite strikingly for the part-time students, this type of course selection leads to some of the lowest retention rates in the data.

Table 1

Two Year Retention Rate for Tested First-Time-in-College Students
by Test Performance and First Term Coursework
1980-1 Through 1981-2

Combinations of Developmental and "Core" Type Courses	Number of Tests with Scores Above the Placement Score by Extra Coursework Taken								Total all Students	
	Three		None		One		Two			
	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No
Developmental Only:										
Enrolled 80-1	24	5	481	145	245	42	107	15	857	207
Returned 81-2	8	1	194	42	116	14	48	6	366	63
% Return	33.3	20.0	40.3	29.0	47.4	33.3	44.9	40.0	42.7	30.4
"Core" Only:										
Enrolled 80-1	1,729	187	230	55	373	68	781	104	3,113	414
Returned 81-2	1,101	85	116	18	225	29	462	49	1,904	181
% Return	63.7	45.5	50.4	32.7	60.3	42.7	59.2	47.1	61.2	43.7
Both Developmental and "Core":										
Enrolled 80-1	85	16	236	142	372	109	346	71	1,039	338
Returned 81-2	56	9	124	61	234	58	190	38	604	166
% Return	65.9	56.3	52.5	43.0	62.9	53.2	54.9	53.5	58.1	49.1
Neither Developmental nor "Core":										
Enrolled 80-1	275	-	173	-	133	-	177	-	758	-
Returned 81-2	132	-	55	-	48	-	69	-	304	-
% Return	48.0	-	31.8	-	36.1	-	39.0	-	40.1	-
Total:										
Enrolled 80-1	2,113	208	1,120	342	1,123	219	1,411	190	5,767	959
Returned 81-2	1,297	95	489	121	623	101	769	93	3,178	410
% Return	61.4	45.7	43.7	35.4	55.5	46.1	54.5	49.0	55.1	42.8

Data Source: B.S.A. Validity Studies Files.

Table 2

Two Year Retention Rate for Tested Full-Time First-Time-in-College Students
by Test Performance and First Term Coursework
1980-1 Through 1981-2

Combinations of Developmental and "Core" Type Courses	Number of Tests with Scores Above the Placement Score by Extra Coursework Taken								Total all Students	
	Three		None		One		Two			
	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No
Developmental Only:										
Enrolled 80-1	14	-	338	-	172	-	67	-	591	-
Returned 81-2	5	-	136	-	84	-	39	-	264	-
% Return	35.7	-	40.2	-	48.8	-	58.2	-	44.7	-
"Core" Only:										
Enrolled 80-1	1,377	38	143	6	259	6	585	22	2,364	72
Returned 81-2	910	24	78	1	169	2	365	16	1,522	43
% Return	66.1	63.2	54.6	16.7	65.3	33.3	62.4	72.7	64.4	59.7
Both Developmental and "Core":										
Enrolled 80-1	74	10	199	98	330	62	305	35	908	205
Returned 81-2	49	7	108	47	210	36	166	22	533	112
% Return	66.2	70.0	54.3	48.0	63.6	58.1	54.4	62.9	58.7	54.6
Neither Developmental nor "Core":										
Enrolled 80-1	116	-	45	-	37	-	47	-	245	-
Returned 81-2	72	-	26	-	23	-	30	-	151	-
% Return	62.1	-	57.8	-	62.2	-	63.8	-	61.6	-
Total:										
Enrolled 80-1	1,581	48	725	104	798	68	1,004	57	4,108	277
Returned 81-2	1,036	31	348	48	486	38	600	38	2,470	155
% Return	65.5	64.6	48.0	46.2	60.9	55.9	59.8	66.7	60.1	56.0

Data Source: B.S.A. Validity Studies Files.

Table 3

Two Year Retention Rate for Tested Part-Time First-Time-in-College Students
by Test Performance and Choice of First Term Coursework
1980-1 Through 1981-2

Combinations of Developmental and "Core" Type Courses	Number of Tests with Scores Above the Placement Score by Extra Coursework Taken								Total all Students	
	Three		None		One		Two			
	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No	Extra Coursework Yes	No
Developmental Only:										
Enrolled 80-1	10	5	143	145	73	42	40	15	266	207
Returned 81-2	3	1	58	42	32	14	9	6	102	63
% Return	30.0	20.0	40.6	29.0	43.8	33.3	22.5	40.0	38.4	30.4
"Core" Only:										
Enrolled 80-1	352	149	87	49	114	62	196	82	749	342
Returned 81-2	191	61	38	17	56	27	97	33	382	138
% Return	54.3	40.9	43.7	34.7	49.1	43.6	49.5	40.2	51.0	40.4
Both Developmental and "Core":										
Enrolled 80-1	11	6	37	44	42	47	41	36	131	133
Returned 81-2	7	2	16	14	24	22	24	16	71	54
% Return	63.6	33.3	43.2	31.8	57.1	46.8	58.5	44.4	54.2	40.6
Neither Developmental nor "Core":										
Enrolled 80-1	159	-	128	-	96	-	130	-	513	-
Returned 81-2	60	-	29	-	25	-	39	-	153	-
% Return	37.7	-	22.7	-	26.0	-	30.0	-	29.8	-
Total:										
Enrolled 80-1	532	160	395	238	325	151	407	133	1,659	682
Returned 81-2	261	64	141	73	137	63	169	55	708	255
% Return	49.1	40.0	35.7	30.7	42.2	41.7	41.5	41.4	42.7	37.4

Data Source: B.S.A. Validity Studies Files.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges JUN 7 1985